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AMID TIGHTER VISA NORMS, INDIAN STUDENT COUNT IN U.S. FALLS 6.2%

Over 3.52 lakh Indians are studying in the US as of February 2026, down from 3.78 lakh last year, the government told Parliament on Thursday

INDIANS IMPACTED BY TRUMP'S VISA POLICY: MoS

The Trump administration expanded screening and vetting for all visa applicants on June 18, 2025. The Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh said this tougher filtering, including increased scrutiny and compliance requirements, had an impact on the number of US student visas issued to Indian nationals

'GOVT RAISING STUDENT CONCERNS WITH U.S.'

- "The new US guidance mentions that every visa adjudication is a national security decision and calls on all applicants to credibly establish their eligibility for the visa sought," Singh said
- The government has been regularly raising all issues being confronted by Indian students with the US authorities, he said

8.92 lakh

ASIAN STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES AS OF MARCH

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

MOONSHOT

The NASA Artemis II SLS (Space Launch System) rocket with the Orion spacecraft launches at the Kennedy Space Center in the wee hours of Thursday, in Cape Canaveral, Florida | AP | P12

WITH THIS ISSUE
BEST WEEKEND GUIDE
INDULGE
40 PAGES, INCLUDING 24 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

At UK-led talks, India for unimpeded transit

60+ nations join Hormuz meet on safe passage options

DAY 34 | WAR WATCH

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

INDIA on Thursday called for immediate de-escalation in West Asia, warning of risks to global energy flows and maritime security, while highlighting that it is the only country to have lost mariners in recent attacks on merchant shipping in the Gulf.

Representing India at a high-level virtual meeting convened by UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said the crisis could only be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue.

The meeting, attended by representatives from over 60 countries including France, Germany, Italy, Canada and the UAE, focused on the deteriorating security situation in key international waterways, particularly the Strait of Hormuz.

In his remarks, the Foreign Secretary talked about "the importance of the principles of freedom of navigation and unimpeded transit through international waterways." an official readout said.

Misri stressed that "the way out of the crisis consisted of de-escalation and a return to the path of diplomacy and dialogue among all concerned parties," signalling India's preference for a political solution over military escalation.

The meeting took place amid heightened tensions after US President Donald Trump suggested that ensuring the security of Hormuz should be the responsibility of nations that rely on it. The US did not participate in the meeting.

The strait remains a critical artery for the global economy, handling nearly 20% of the world's oil and LNG shipments and its ongoing blockade sent oil prices soaring above $100 per barrel. Two Indian seafarers had lost their lives since the beginning of the war.

Cooper accused Iran of disrupting global trade. "We have seen Iran hijack an international shipping route to hold the global economy hostage," she said, warning of ripple effects across energy, fertiliser and fuel supply chains worldwide.

European countries, initially reluctant to commit naval forces, are now exploring a coordinated approach amid rising energy costs. Officials said the meeting marked the first step toward forming a coalition to restore safe passage. Initial plans include clearing mines from the waterway and ensuring protection for commercial vessels, with further consultations involving military planners expected in the coming weeks.

Videograb of a strike on an IRGC missile base in Iran's Baharestan, Isfahan | X

Customs duty off

Full customs duty exemption granted on critical petrochemical products for three months till June 30. Will help industries like plastics, packaging, textiles, pharma, chemicals, automotive components etc. Revenue loss pegged at ₹1,800 crore

Don gives no timeline

US President Donald Trump claims Israel and US were close to completing their key objectives in the war against Iran, adding the conflict would soon be over, but doesn't provide an exact timeline

Iran's pushback

Iran threatened "crushing" attacks on the US and Israel, firing missiles at Tel Aviv and US bases after Trump vowed to bomb the Islamic Republic "back to the Stone Ages"

SC stinker as mob gheraoes judges in WB

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Thursday came down heavily on the West Bengal government for its inaction over the gherao of judicial officers in Malda district during the special intensive revision (SIR) drive, ordering an independent probe by the CBI or NIA.

"We direct the ECI to entrust the enquiry /investigation to either the CBI or NIA. The compliance report shall be submitted to this court. The agency shall be obligated to submit a preliminary enquiry report directly to this court," said a bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant during an urgent hearing on Thursday morning.

The court took suo motu cognisance after it received a letter from the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court detailing how the judicial officers, including three women, were held captive for nine hours without food or water by protesters who claimed their names were deleted from the voter list.

The incident occurred during the SIR exercise in the Kaliachowk area of Malda district.

The bench said the incident exposes the 'complete failure of the state administration'.

"We have never seen such a polarised state. Unfortunately, in your state, each one of you speaks political language. That is the most unfortunate thing. We have never seen such a polarized state," the CJI told West Bengal's Advocate General.

The bench also asked the election commission to deploy adequate central forces for the safety of judicial officers in the poll-bound state.

Didi blames it on EC

Mamata Banerjee distanced herself from the incident saying "EC failed to protect the judicial officers". "My powers have been taken away; Bengal defamed," she said

This incident is a brazen attempt not only to browbeat judicial officers but challenge authority of this court
Supreme Court

EC hands over case to NIA; probe team to reach today

Kolkata: Hours after the SC order, the Election Commission of India handed over the probe into the gherao of the seven judicial officers in West Bengal's Malda district to the NIA. A top official of the poll body said the NIA team would reach West Bengal on Friday. The gherao happened when the officers were engaged in adjudicating cases of voters whose names had been marked "under adjudication" in the draft electoral rolls. The protesters initially sought a meeting but then resorted to a prolonged gherao

GBA to regularise up to 15% violation of building bylaws

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka government on Wednesday published a draft notification for amendment of building bylaws in Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) limits, which proposes to regularise deviation of up to 15 per cent from the sanctioned plan.

The government has decided to amend the Building Bye-laws 2003 by increasing the violation limit and regularising it by paying a fine.

As per the draft notification, citizens can submit objections and suggestions to the respective municipal corporations within 30 days of publication of the notification, or till April 30.

"As per the guidance of Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru Development Minister DK Shivakumar, the State Government has given good news to property owners in Greater Bengaluru area. Considering the hardships of several building owners, the violation limit in building constructions has been increased from the current 5 per cent to 15 per cent, which is a significant and popular decision," said GBA Chief Commissioner M Maheshwar Rao. P2

TESTING TIMES

City autos at a standstill as LPG crisis worsens

ANUBHAB ROY @Bengaluru

THE disruption in LPG supply has nearly driven autorickshaws off the road in the city. Commuters are mostly relying on CNG-fitted autorickshaws.

Bowring Service Station on St. Mark's Road, one of the few LPG bunkers in service on Wednesday, ran out of supply on Thursday. A station-in-charge said that there would not be any supply on Friday as well.

Sajan, who owns and drives an LPG-run autorickshaw, lives in KR Puram. "Someone told me in the morning that a bunker in Bannerghatta had LPG supply. But it did not make any sense to go to Bannerghatta from KR Puram to fill my vehicle, especially because even if the information was genuine, it was likely that the supply would run out before I reached," he said, adding that all he and LPG drivers like him could do is wait and follow the news for updates. P2

STAR CAMPAIGNER

Tharoor moves from sidelines to spotlight

K S SREEJITH @ T'Puram

TILL a few weeks ago, he was ignored and isolated by his own party in Kerala. But now, as the poll heat in Kerala has breached tolerance levels, the same Congress leaders are vying with each other to get his date.

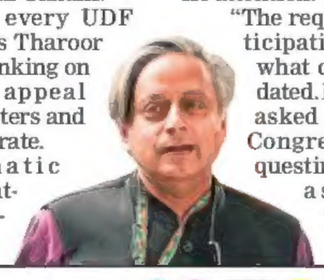
Congress MP Shashi Tharoor now has no time to rest, as United Democratic Front (UDF) candidates carry him from one campaign site to the next, hoping his charismatic persona and suave communication skills will draw voters.

In the run-up to the assembly elections — Kerala goes to polls on April 9 — Tharoor has emerged the most sought after star campaigner of the Congress, after Rahul Gandhi.

Sources say every UDF candidate wants Tharoor to campaign, banking on his popular appeal among urban voters and the wider electorate.

The dramatic change in the attitude of regional leaders is hard to miss. In a recent road show Tharoor shared stage with Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan, who was once his staunch adversary, drawing significant public attention.

"The requests for his participation often exceed what can be accommodated. Leaders who once asked him to quit the Congress are now requesting his presence," a senior leader told this newspaper.



56 seats to be covered

Tharoor is expected to cover 56 constituencies. In the first leg, from March 21 to April 1, he visited 37 constituencies. From April 2 to 6, he will participate in road shows with candidates

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